Adjustments in Agriculture—A Challenge to Agronomy

IV. Implications to Extension Service

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For the purpose of our discussion today, we are assuming that within the foreseeable future there will be change in agriculture. This is not new. Agriculture in this country has always been changing. Now we are calling it Agricultural Adjustment. The only thing that seems to be different for this discussion is that we are trying to decide which way to turn and how to prepare for it before we reach the sharp curve in the road.

Our primary interest is how the adjustment immediately ahead is going to affect the Extension Agronomist. If we first determine the common concerns of the extension worker and then study some of the expected changes that may affect these concerns, we should find a reasonable answer.

You need not talk long with extension agronomists to conclude there are three main concerns associated with their work. These are:

1. Who is the audience? What are their wants, goals, problems, and needs?
2. What are the answers to the questions they may ask? How can I keep the agents up-to-date and, at times, what should be supplied in the way of materials and training so they can solve their own problems?
3. How can these skills and materials be transferred most effectively and efficiently? What are the best available communication channels for the job still within the budget?

If we assume these are the common concerns, then let us look to what we might expect in the way of changes that will affect them.

1. There will be fewer farmers.
2. There will be more suburbanites who will garden for fun or recreation, and to have something to talk about.
3. The farms will be larger.
4. There will be more specialization, or less general farming, and, as in the past, farmers that specialize know more about their job and are hungry for further information.
5. More of the farmers will have had agricultural training—either high school, college, vocational, or in-service.
6. The spread between outstanding and average farmers will become greater.
7. Farmers will be more aware of the need for keeping up with the times.
8. A larger portion of the remaining farmers will be more aware of the need for keeping up with the times.
9. Young folks entering the farming business will need more guidance. The brawn of today will continue to give way to the brains and capital of tomorrow.
10. Farmers will tend to make shifts in a career more rapidly than at present.
11. Nine out of every 10 boys now on the farm will not be involved in farming when they reach 4-H Club age will need to find work in some other occupation than farming, or consider themselves unemployed.

Now what can we expect in the way of subject matter or the place we get the answers to our questions?

1. More of the information reported and published will be removed from the point of application, and what there will be more studies of principles than of applied information.
2. Research results will be more fragmented and the pieces will not only be smaller, but the gaps between them. The extension agronomist will need to spend more time studying the fields and the effects of the changes on him as an individual, and the field together to determine the best course of action, including the effects on his area of responsibility.
3. More reports will be written in the future that will need translating and interpreting, and keeping them meaningful for the extension worker at the county level and the audience he is serving.
4. The specialist will probably find he will spend more time studying the field to get the subject matter to best determine the fields and the effects of the changes on him as an individual, and the field together to determine the best course of action, including the effects on his area of responsibility.
5. Specialists will find it essential to have more specialists in other fields in order to avoid conflicts in recommendations.

This list is far from complete but should start our thinking along that line. The extensions that may affect our communication may look like this:

1. Printed material will be more attractive and informative.
2. Color work in publications will increase.
3. More effort will be made to get joint publications between states.
4. More extension agronomists will find television a good thing and will plan to have their programs attractive, informative, and useful.
5. The telephone will be used more by farmers.
6. Specialists will find they have two audie: (a) extension agents as in the past, and (b) research people before he can get enough of the research people before he can get enough of the general public and his related field—and the spread between outstanding and average farmers will become greater.